



## **Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges**

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30 December 2005

Jeff Ottesen, Director  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Division of Program Development  
3132 Channel Drive, Room 200, Mail Stop 2500  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: DRAFT 2006-2008 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program,  
Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area.

Dear Mr. Ottesen:

I am writing on behalf of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, which serves all of the 16 National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska. It has come to our attention that the Draft 2006-2008 STIP has dropped the listing for the new Visitor Center planned for Tok. This project was listed in the 2004-2006 STIP as the *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area*. For more than five years, this project has been moving forward to plan, design, and construct a new multipurpose visitor facility that would serve as an Alaska Public Lands Information Center, a new Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, and a rest area and trip planning facility for visitors traveling the Alaska Highway.

The design for this Visitor Center is nearly complete, funds are available for land acquisition, and it will be ready to move into the construction phase. However, it must be identified in the STIP in order to be eligible for the funds that are currently available. In these times of tight budgets, it would indeed be unfortunate if the failure to list this important project in the STIP were to result in the loss of an excellent opportunity to complete it after five years of planning and design efforts have been expended.

A new, strategically-located Tok Visitor Center is of great importance to the State of Alaska and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This facility will serve clients and visitors by providing comprehensive statewide trip planning and information on access to all of Alaska's public lands, rest and comfort amenities, and Alaska Marine Highway reservations. As they enter Alaska and visit this facility, visitors will receive the professional and inviting welcome that befits this Great Land. The Visitor Center will provide current travel information related to road construction, wildfire conditions, and weather that will assist visitors to travel safely and efficiently to their chosen destinations.

The proposed construction of the Tok Visitor Center has fostered other community and tourism projects in Tok. The local Chamber of Commerce recently added its visitor center to the project plan, which will enhance the entire facility. The Tok Visitor Center will increase regional efforts to promote tourism in Eastern Alaska. The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges believes that the new Tok Visitor Center will provide significant economic benefits to the Tok area and will serve as a key component of the tourism infrastructure in Alaska. We strongly urge you to restore this project to its rightful place in the STIP.

Sincerely yours,

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